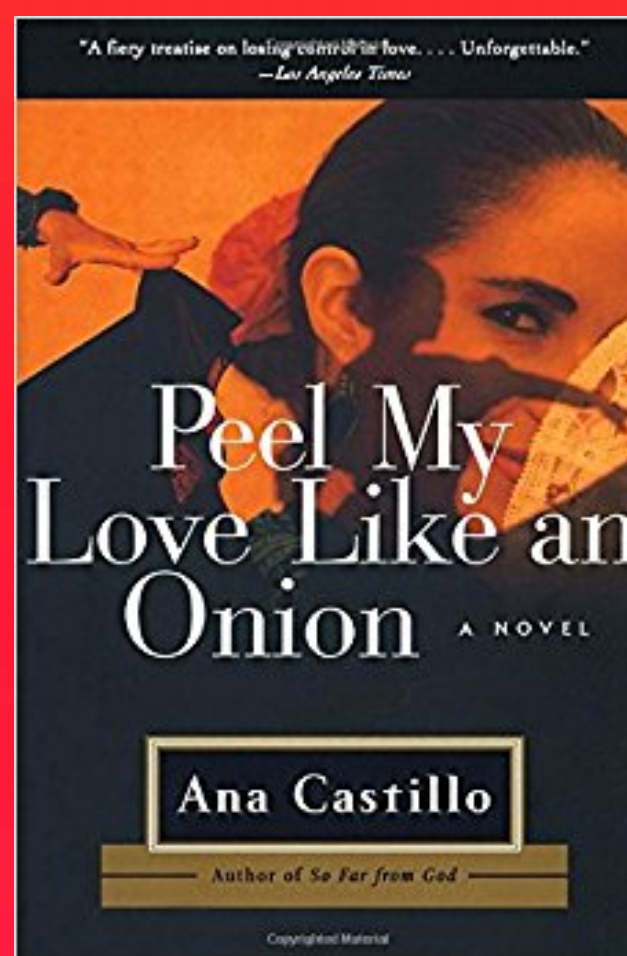


MATERNAL INHERITANCE: LOVE AND SELF-IDENTITY IN MEXICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

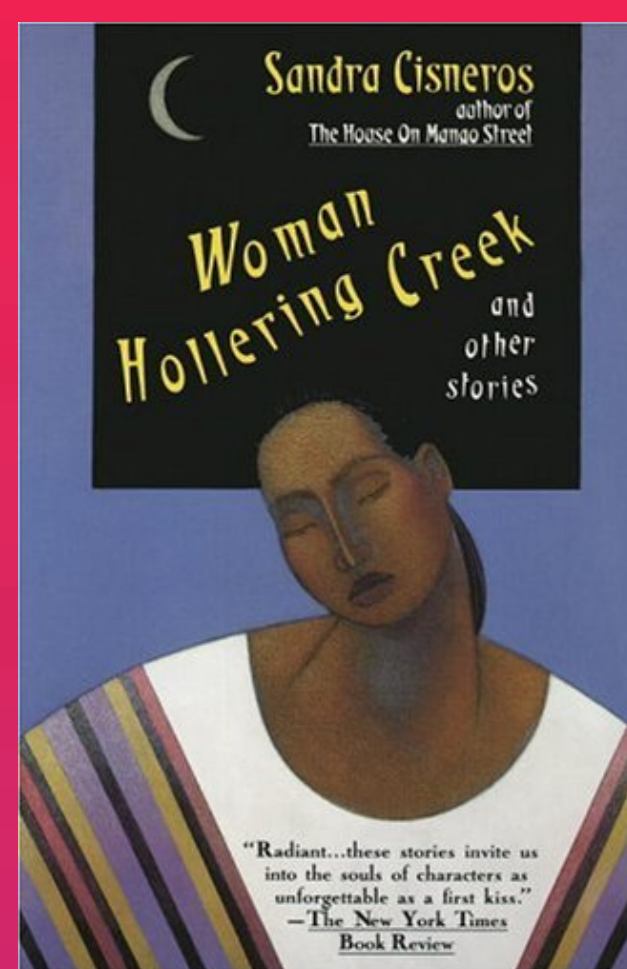
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ABSTRACT

The roles assigned to a woman within a particular culture are defined by the cultural forces that have been set in place as tradition and that have been set as paradigms of what a woman should be and can be identified as. Because being a woman makes one capable of becoming a mother, the roles that are passed down from mother to daughter become extremely important. Therefore, maternal love and romantic love have much to do with what has been culturally mandated as the norm. Rejection, refusal, and expulsion of all that is acceptable within a particular cultural discourse can greatly impact the identity of the women that have dared aspire to an existence outside of these paradigms. The giving or withholding of a specific type of love, along with the implications of said love within a specific norm, is therefore contingent on the space a woman chooses to inhabit. Through literary works including Ana Castillo's *So Far From God* and Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*, this project explores the cultural discourses and set narratives that have shaped the roles and expectations of women in Mexican American culture. Specifically, the way in which the space a woman chooses to inhabit, outside or within the margins of an already marginalized group, affects her capability and likelihood to receive or be denied a specific type of love, be it maternal, romantic, and/or most importantly, self-love or love of one's own or prescribed identity.



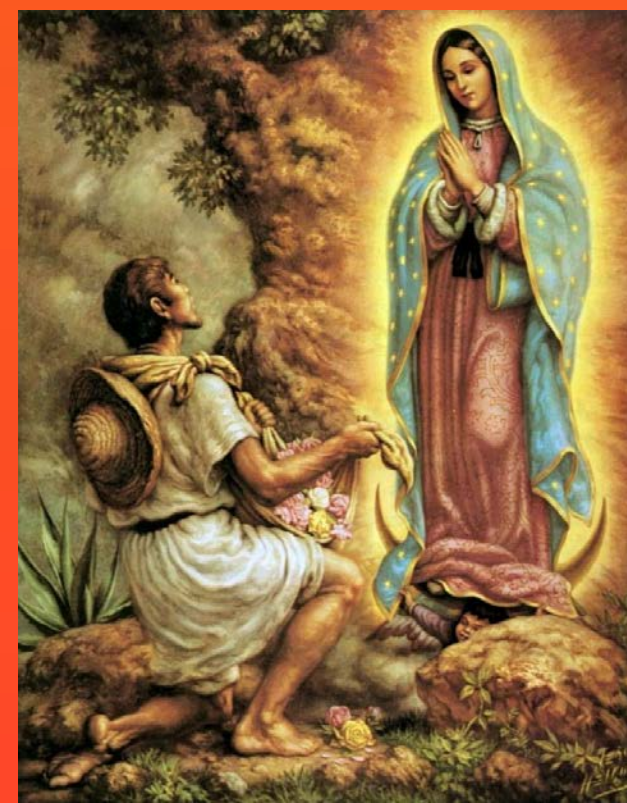
Castillo's novel centers on the life of Carmen, a flamenco dancer whose leg was disabled by polio during childhood. Carmen is not only faced with her decreasing ability as a dancer, but also with the complexities of her love life as well as her tense relationship with her mother. In the end, what Carmen decides is to choose her own passion and dictate her own happiness without following what her mother expects of her nor needing the immediate presence of a man in her life.



This book consists of a collection of short stories that depict the lives of different women of diverse ages. Each story centers on different types of love these women experience. For the purposes of my research, I looked specifically at five stories: "One Holy Night," "Woman Hollering Creek," "Never Marry a Mexican," "There Was a Man, There Was a Woman," and "Bien Pretty." The characters in these stories all experience a specific type of love that determines their place in society as well as the way they are perceived by those around them.

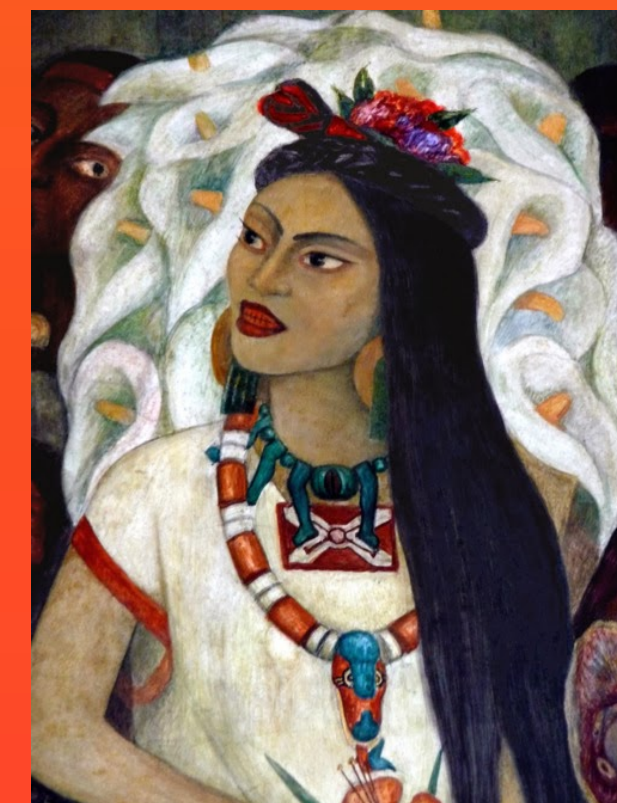
MOTHER ARCHETYPES

La Virgen de Guadalupe, **La Malinche**, and **La Llorona** symbolize the three archetypal mothers that represent the virgin/whore binary that is so problematically pervasive in Mexican culture (Herrera 7). The reason it has been problematic is because it "has been the motif on which Chicana womanhood and motherhood has been defined" (Herrera 7). Consequently, Chicana writers have challenged and resisted the construction of maternity within such a narrow scope.



LA VIRGEN DE GUADALUPE

La madre quien jamás ha abandonado a sus hijos.
The mother who has not abandoned her children.



LA MALINCHE

La madre violada a quien sus hijos la han abandonado.
The raped mother whose children have abandoned her.



LA LLORONA

La madre quien busca a sus hijos perdidos y que es una combinación de las dos.
The mother who seeks her lost children and is a combination of the two.



AMOR A TODAS HORAS

by Simón Silva

In Mexican American Literature, the mother type appears with regularity. More specifically, what appears is a "recognition and celebration of...a 'maternal heritage'" (Ortega and Sternbach 12).

This context, however, does not just center on abuelas and mothers, but on the entire extended family of women. As such, the examination of the mother-daughter relationship is central to the study of Mexican American Literature written by women. In their writing, these women attempt to "rewrite the script of maternity outside existing discourses, which present Chicana mothers as passive and servile and the subsequent mother-daughter relationship as a source of tension, frustration, and angst" (Herrera 7).

Though the mother-daughter relationship is often depicted as problematic and as source of tension, the maternal inheritance passed on to the daughter plays a crucial role in the daughter's construction of her own identity. Therefore, the daughter must acknowledge that a rejection of her mother is a rejection of her self. So, it is then the responsibility of the daughter to mediate the union between her self and her mother without sacrificing the unique identity she is attempting to construct and affirm.

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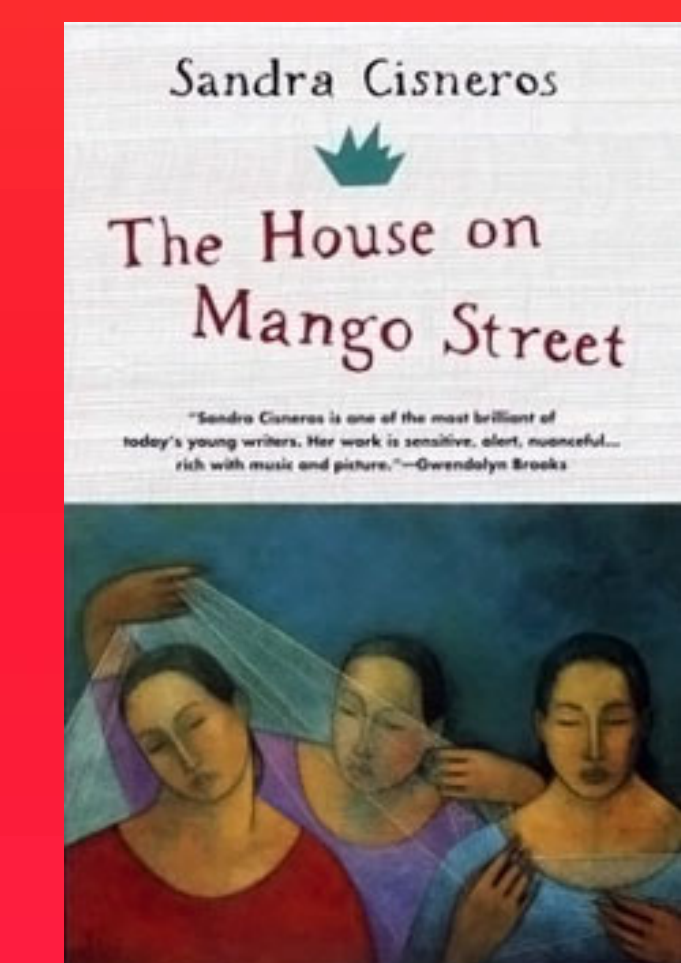
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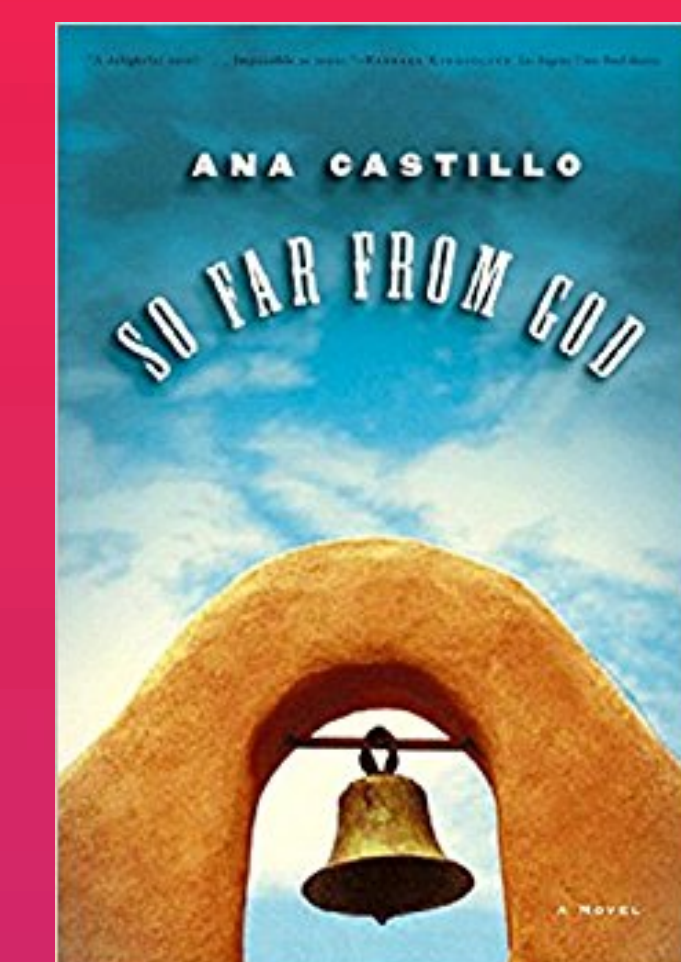
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In this coming of age story, Cisneros gives voice to Esperanza. Throughout the book, Esperanza relates her interactions with different women of different ages. The lives that these women live reinforce the roles the women who came before them have filled as well as the ones that society has prescribed for women with Esperanza's background. Though she refuses to take on the roles that she is expected to fill, she determines to do so without neglecting the part of her identity that connects her to the women whose place she is determined not to take.



Castillo's novel centers on Sofia and her four daughters, Fe, Esperanza, Caridad, and La Loca who must endure the hardships that life brings their way. The hardships that Sofia and her daughters must face (with the exception of La Loca) are all connected to their relationships with men and the space each woman chooses to inhabit. However, as the story progresses, these women redefine the roles that have been prescribed to them and that they have taken on for themselves.